



MOLLUSCUM

What is Molluscum contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum is a common, typically benign, mild skin disease caused by a poxvirus. It causes small pink or skin-colored bumps on the skin. These bumps can develop anywhere on the skin. Molluscum contagiosum does not affect any internal organs of the body. Although not limited to children, it is most common in children between the ages of 1 and 10 years.

How do you get Molluscum contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum is spread from person to person by direct skin-to-skin contact, sexual contact, or by touching a surface with the virus on it, such as a towel, shared athletic equipment, clothing, or toys. If a person has the virus, they can also spread the infection to other parts of their own body by touching or scratching a lesion and then touching another part of their body.

What are the symptoms of Molluscum contagiosum?

The virus causes lesions on the skin, known as Mollusca. They are small, raised, and usually white, pink, or flesh-colored with a dimple or pit in the center. They often have a pearly appearance and can appear alone or in groups. They are usually smooth and firm. In most people, the lesions range from about the size of a pinhead to as large as a pencil eraser (2 to 5 millimeters in diameter). Typically, they are benign and painless but may become itchy, sore, red, and/or swollen.

Mollusca may occur anywhere on the body including the face, neck, arms, legs, abdomen, and genital area. The lesions are rarely found on the palms of the hands or the soles of the feet. Mollusca appear alone or in groups.

How is Molluscum contagiosum diagnosed?

Molluscum contagiosum is usually diagnosed based on a medical history and physical examination. The bumps are unique; diagnosis can be made by their characteristic appearance. Tissue or fluid taken from the bumps can also be examined under a microscope to confirm the diagnosis.

What is the treatment for Molluscum contagiosum?

Molluscum contagiosum is self-limited in healthy individuals and treatment may be unnecessary because the bumps will typically disappear by themselves within six to 12 months. Nonetheless, issues such as lesion visibility, underlying atopic disease, and the desire to prevent transmission may prompt therapy. Treatment options should be discussed with a health care provider but could include physical removal (similar to wart removals), oral therapy, or topical therapy.



Frequently Asked Questions

Treatment for Molluscum contagiosum is usually recommended if lesions are in the genital area (on or near the penis, vulva, vagina, or anus). If lesions are found in this area, it is a good idea to visit your health care provider as there is a possibility that you may have another disease spread by sexual contact. Be aware that some treatments available through the Internet may not be effective and may even be harmful. Do not try to remove lesions without consulting a health care provider.

How can Molluscum contagiosum be prevented?

The best way to prevent Molluscum contagiosum is to practice good hygiene habits, particularly proper hand hygiene. It is also important not to touch, pick, or scratch any skin with bumps or blisters (yours or someone else's). Picking and scratching can spread the virus to other parts of the body and makes it easier to spread the disease to other people, too.

Keep areas with molluscum lesions clean, dry, and covered. Lesions can be uncovered when there is no risk of contact with other people to help keep the skin healthy. Avoid sharing personal items such as clothing and towels or participating in contact sports. Swimming should also be avoided unless all lesions can be covered by watertight bandages.

Adults that have bumps in the genital region should avoid sexual activities until they see a health care provider. Children in school or daycare should wear appropriate clothing or bandages to cover the bumps. Exclusion is only considered if there is drainage or extreme itching and if the areas cannot be adequately covered.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,
<https://www.cdc.gov/poxvirus/molluscum-contagiosum/index.html>

Delaware's "Managing Infectious Disease in Childcare Settings" manual:
<https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/epi/files/ChildCareManual2021.pdf>